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Finding Yourself

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IT IS DURING the high school period that the stage in one's education is or should be reached, when he realizes that "the universe is full of good. No kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but thru his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he until he has tried."

Adolesence is essentially the period of self-discovery. It is the time of shifting interests and moods, of experimentation, of driving curiosity. It is the normal time for assaying abilities and projecting careers in line with discovered aptitudes. It is the time for discarding as unattainable the illusory goals for which we are manifestly unfitted, but which have been cherished at an earlier age.

The injunction, "Know Thyself" has come down to us through the ages, but our estimate of the importance of self-knowledge has been greatly increased in recent years. Modern phychology has shown us scientifically and quantitatively the vast differences which exist among individuals. At the same time our social organization has specialized its function past a point never before reached and the premium on specialized ability has tremendously increased.

We know now that individuals vary in intelligence from the imbecile to the genius; that there is no sharp line which divides the normal from the subnormal, but a gradation all along the line. We know that, as society is now organized, one man may be worth to society as much as 100,000 others. We recognized that mechanical ability may vary from that of a person to whom a crow-bar is a mechanical mystery to the genius of the designers and builders of our intricate machines, bridges and sky-scrapers. Seashore's musical tests have revealed some children 200 times as sensitive to pitch as others. Hollingsworth tells us that "it is probably no exaggeration to say that, in an ordinary class in the elementary school, children are being taught together, some of whom are at least a hundred times as musical as others".

Studies of reading ability have brought to us cases ranging all the way from the "word-blind" who never learn to read to the child who, at two years of age, is able to read fluently. Studies at Iowa State College, with students who have had approximately equal opportunities for acquiring reading ability, show some to have more than four times as much ability as others in getting the sense of the printed page in a given time.

Wide limits in ability in arithmetic have also been discovered. Tom Fuller, born in Africa in 1710, came to this country as a slave when 14 years of age. He first came to attention as a calculator at 70 years of age when he reduced a year and a half to seconds in about two minutes, and 70 years, 17 days, 12 hours to seconds in about a minute and a half, correcting the result of his examiner who had not taken leap years into account. He also calculated mentally the sum of a simple geometrical progression and multiplied mentally two numbers of nine figures each. He was totally illiterate.

Persons with practically no ability for drawing are fairly common. Doubtless if this ability could be measured quantitatively, some would be found with several hundred times as much ability as others.

What is true of the abilities we have named is also true of any other ability which might be named. The same enormous range holds generally.

A senior class in my home high school once had for a motto, "Rowing against the stream, not drifting with the tide".

I never have been able to appreciate the philosophy implied. It has always seemed saner to row with the stream. The amount of time and effort spent in attempting the impossible is enormous. It has been estimated that $10,000,000 is spent annually in providing music lessons for children who have too little musical ability to reward the efforts. Not only is there loss of time and effort, but there is disillusion and discouragement, the creation of habits of failure, with consequences too great and far-reaching to trace, when the impossible is attempted.

What should one have discovered about himself by the end of the high school period?

As regards ability, the most significant thing to be known is one's "general ability". Abilities tend to correlate. It is generally agreed that our misfits are not "square pegs in round holes" or vice versa, but "big pegs in little holes" or "little pegs in big holes". That is, to quote McCall, and to change the metaphor, "the spokes in one's wheel of ability are of approximately equal length". The differences in individual ability are mainly, though not entirely, in the length of the "spokes".

This conception of ability makes its way with difficulty because it goes against many of our preconceived notions. It offends our sense of fair play. We like to believe in compensations, in the general distribution of equivalent tho not identical abilities. Our enthusiasm for democracy sometimes leads us to the conclusion that because all are equal before the law, they are also equal in every other way. But biological law does not operate that way. The tendency always is toward the concentration of strains possessing desirable abilities and the segregation and ultimate destruction of inferior qualities. To cite Hollingsworth again, "Nearly all stupid persons are inferior in all capacities. The greatest majority of gifted persons are superior in nearly all their abilities. The majority of human beings are neither markedly inferior nor markedly superior, but are 'typical' (not far from the median or average) in all respects."

To say that one's general level of ability is the most important thing to know, does not imply that special abilities are to be disregarded. There are certain qualities which seem to be associated loosely, if at all, with general ability. Most significant among these are mechanical ability. These may be very high in individuals of low general capacity or almost absent in persons otherwise very capable.

Special disabilities should also be known. Some may be permanent, some only temporary and removable. Color blindness, language disability, physical defects, defects in personality and in character should be brought to light. If they can be removed, definite campaigns should be laid out and carried out for their elimination.

During the high school period also, one should discover the forms of recreation which are personally appropriate. These vary widely with individuals. What is one's meat is another's poison, avocationly. What recreates one may enervate another. The forms of physical exercise which will keep one fit and which are sufficiently interesting to be followed consistently should also be discovered. These, too, are individual.

One should by all means learn for himself early in life the type of religious worship which is most satisfying and fruitful for him. Religion appeals variously to various types of persons. One should seek out the group most congenial for fellowship in the religious life. It must not be allowed to languish because the creed, form of worship or personnel of the church in which one is brought up are not conducive to satisfactory religious development.

It is as important to know one's emotions as to know one's intellectual abilities. We are largely creatures of feelings. Our actions are prompted more often by our feelings than by conscious willingness. The emotions give zest to life. They are invaluable. Many failures are doubtless due to their inadequate development. The person who cannot feel with other people is unsympathetic and heedless of their welfare. In extreme forms, such defects lead to murder and other unfeeling brutalities. The person emotionally deficient has an enormous handicap. On the other hand, there are those who are excessively emotional, who are controlled by emotion. This cannot be tolerated. The emotions must be kept in leash. They can be. Moodiness, flights of unwarranted optimism and depths of pessimism and cynicism, fits of anger, brainstorms are all avoidable even in those persons inheriting tendencies toward them.

The extent and kind of education personally adapted should, by all means, be learned before high school graduation. One's fitness for college should be determined. Thousands of young people are eliminated from our colleges during their first year because so totally unsuited for higher education that their space is more desirable than their presence. Such an elimination is a great discouragement, sometimes a positive disgrace. It is avoidable.

But it is not merely necessary to decide whether to attend college, it is also obvious that a definite college adapted to one's individual needs should be chosen and that not on the basis of relative strengths of athletic teams, nearness to home, the number of one's family or friends who have attended, or any other

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Tomato—1 quart canned tomatoes boiled to 1c, ½ pound American cheese and ½ pound dried beef ground together. Mix and add salt and pepper. Boil to desired thickness for spreading. When cold beat in one egg.

Tomato—Thinly sliced, pimento, cheese, dressing. (Do not make until ready to serve.)

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of the casual factors which seem to determine most choices. Nor should the choice be made on slight acquaintance with one or two institutions. The field should be surveyed and the type of institution most promising selected, then an intensive study of the institutions of this general type should be made.

Having chosen the definite institution to be attended, it is often necessary to make a choice of course immediately on entrance. A wrong choice means loss of time. An Iowa State College freshman of last year journeyed from Pennsylvania to Ames, arriving undecided as to whether he should take Mining Engineering or Animal Husbandry. He chose the former, pursued it unsuccessfully for two quarters and this year is enrolled in a dental course at Pittsburgh University. Doubtless this venture in self-discovery was valuable to him in many ways, but most of us do not have the time or money for such "wild goose chases". It might be added that such indecision as his is by no means uncommon among college freshmen.

Eugene Davenport, formerly Dean of Agriculture at Illinois University, once made the statement that "high school students are delivered into college much as the stacker delivers straw" and one dealing with college freshmen feels often the aptness of the illustration. "We're in college, but what for?" seems a common mental attitude. The investment of four of one's best years, the use of which largely determine the nature of one's destiny should not be so lightly considered.

These suggestions imply that a choice of life work is to be made during the high school period and for 95 percent of our people such a choice is probably advisable. Only a few can defer choice while pursuing a general education in a liberal arts college. Perhaps these, too, would be benefited by a tentative choice and probably most of them do make some such choice.

There is no more important life decision than vocational choice since it determines the way in which our waking hours are largely to be spent for the remainder of our lives. The wisdom of our choice sets the limits of our earning power and so the standard of living which is to be ours for life. Our principal contribution to society must be in the field of our vocation so that one's value to society is at stake when vocational choice is made.

So important a choice must not be merely a "whim". It must be a sound judgment, based upon a thoro knowledge of one's capacities and aptitudes, and an equally thoro knowledge of the field of occupations to which these capacities and aptitudes admit. With more than 2000 occupations open to the chooser, choice must not be made on passing acquain-

tance with the few which we casually encounter. Nor does this mean that local opportunities are to be overlooked. The tendency usually is to seek the apparently greener grass across the fence only to be disillusioned.

Much might be written about means of discovering these significant abilities. The writer proposes, however, to leave to inquiring and experimenting adolescense the methods of finding them out, now that they have been enumerated. It should be added, however, that self-discovery is a life-long process, that is a part of the adventure of life. Further, it should be stated that there is little of fatalism in the philosophy expounded, but rather a belief that the factors of a successful life are in the hands of the ordinary individual, that many more of the qualities which make for achievement are alterable than are fixed by nature. In any case, the proper measure of success is the ratio of what one does to what he might have done and in this sense success is possible for all.

A final word to adults seems to be in order. Too often attempts are made to hinder, rather than help self-discovery. There is dissatisfaction with the high school boy or girl because they are not stable and settled, forgetting that such stability can only result in the dwarfing of personality. Nature has provided that adolescence shall be a period of exploration. Permanent interests are not to be expected at this stage. In shifting from one interest to another, from one viewpoint to another, from one ideal or here to another, the individual acquaints himself with his social environment, acquires a genuine sympathy with the lives and ways of thinking of others and incidentally finds himself. There is a tendency toward stabilization toward the end of the high school period, but the years 12 to 16 are and should be exploratory.

Stories of the Sand

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playgrounds were designed and executed; favorite pastimes, such as camping, were illustrated with lake, mountains, tents and campfire.

Illustrating stories was the most fun of all. "The Last of the Mohicans" was twice as thrilling when the background was worked out graphically before their eyes. Stories of the Bible and of history were much more real—in fact, they proved to be really interesting.

To make these complicated models realistic, the children used many ingenious re-inforcements. Match sticks served excellently as fence posts and as tent-poles. A bent hairpin proved also to be a Jack-of-all-trades. Sticks and strings made most effective telephone systems, and a little cornstarch, wheedled from the cook, made a snow-capped mountain truly beautiful.

The finishing touch to these models, in the childrens' eyes, was the fact that if they were especially good, we took their picture and added it to the steadily growing Sandcraft Memorybook.

Again, increased power of observation must follow. The children note their surroundings more carefully, see their differences and points of interest, and partially, as result of this, develop a better sense of proportion and line. They learn to make a street the right width as compared to the size of their houses, and to